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TO RUEHMD/AMEMBASSY MADRID IMMEDIATE 0116
RUEHOT/AMEMBASSY OTTAWA IMMEDIATE 0029
RUEHDG/AMEMBASSY SANTO DOMINGO IMMEDIATE 0018
RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2591
INFO RUEHWH/WESTERN HEMISPHERIC AFFAIRS DIPL POSTS IMMEDIATE
RUCOGCA/NAVSTA GUANTANAMO BAY CU IMMEDIATE
RUCPDOC/DEPT OF COMMERCE WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE
RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE
RHMFIASS/Joint STAFF WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE
RHMFIASS/HQ USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL IMMEDIATE
RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE
RUCOWCV/CCGDSEVEN MIAMI FL IMMEDIATE
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 HAVANA 001145

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DEPT FOR WHA/CCA

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TAGS: CU PGOV PHUM PINR PREL

SUBJECT: CUBA TO SIGN UN ACCORDS AS DEMONSTRATIONS MARK
HUMAN RIGHTS DAY

Classified By: COM: Michael E. Parmly: For reasons 1.4 b/d

11. (C) SUMMARY: Human Rights Day in Cuba saw a wide variety of activity. The Damas de Blanco held two well attended marches on Sunday and Monday to mark the Day. Although state security forces monitored these activities closely, the authorities avoided any significant confrontation. In contrast, a crowd of 100 people shouting pro-government slogans broke up a small demonstration in a Havana park organized by Dr. Darsi Ferrer. More than 200 people, representing a broad cross section of Cuban civil society, attended a reception on 10 June at COM residence to commemorate Human Rights Day. Meanwhile, on 10 June on the occasion of International Human Rights Day Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque announced that Cuba will sign the UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights as well as the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

He also announced that Cuba will allow more special rapporteurs from the newly reconstituted UN Human Rights Council to visit the island. End Summary.

12. (C) On 9 December the Damas de Blanco, an organization of wives and supporters of political prisoners, held their weekly walk following mass at St. Rita. Sixty people participated in the march. Additionally, after mass, a group of fifteen women visiting from Spain, Bosnia and Peru unfurled banners in front of the church that read "Democracy" and "Peace and Liberty". On this occasion the Damas decided to march for four blocks to the National Assembly. Damas de Blanco leader Laura Pollan stated that on the way they encountered three "actos de repudio" by persons shouting insults, but these were very small and none of the groups consisted of more than four or five people. On the positive side, Pollan stated that she had never seen such a high level of public support. She stated that many passers-by and people in cars frequently waved and called out words of encouragement. Laura Pollan said that a state security officer gave her an open hand slap to the back of the head. She was not seriously injured and there were no further reports of violence. Pollan said that when she and other

marchers were returning on a bus, a man and a woman started shouting insults at them, but quieted down as soon as other passengers told the couple to leave the Damas alone.

¶3. (C) Police detained opposition leader Jorge Luis Garcia Perez Antunez and three others while they were leaving after the march. They were held for about three hours and released. Antunez was sent back to his home town of Placetas. The Cuban government quickly deported eight of the Spanish women who had unfurled the banners. The women reportedly were members of the Catalan political organization, Convergencia i Unio (CiU). Several independent journalists stated that on 9 December police had confiscated the identity cards of an opposition leader in Matanzas and one in Isla de la Juventud to prevent them from attending protest activities in Havana. Noted dissident Elizardo Sanchez reported fifty two detentions in Cuba on 9 and 10 December. All of these were released after several hours and several, such as Carlos Milares Falcon, President of the Independent Democratic Front, attended the reception at the COM residence on the afternoon of 10 December.

¶4. (U) The Damas de Blanco on 10 December held another protest in Park Villalon in front of a statue of Martin Luther King. Laura Pollan gave a speech demanding the release of political prisoners. Pollan and other Damas stated that they were surrounded by state security but none of the authorities attempted to interfere in any way with the protest. Pollan offered a branch of gladiolas to a state security officer who accepted it politely.

¶5. (C) Also, on 10 December Dr. Darsi Ferrer and eleven others staged a protest in a Havana park demanding an end to the preferential treatment of foreigners over Cubans in

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health care centers and tourist facilities. His group was quickly confronted by a crowd of 100 people shouting pro-government slogans. Pol officer and a diplomat from the Embassy of the Netherlands witnessed Ferrer's group run around the block four times with the crowd pursuing them flanked by many news cameramen. The streets were full of people in plain clothes speaking into walkee talkies. Pol officer did not observe any violence, but Dr. Ferrer stated that several members of his group were pushed roughly and struck in the head and body. The protesters were shoved into unmarked cars, driven away from the scene and dropped off. There were no arrests as the result of the incident.

¶6. (C) More than 200 people attended an afternoon reception at the COM residence. They represented a broad cross section of civil society, the diplomatic corps, and the international press. On 11 December the Portuguese ambassador informed COM that at a December 6 meeting of the EU ambassadors it was decided to send no one above the rank of DCM to this event. Nevertheless the ambassadors of Hungary and the Czech Republic attended, as did the Ambassadors of Lebanon, Japan and Nigeria. The crowd reacted very positively to COM's speech on the historic and continuing relevance of the Declaration of Human Rights. There was a heavy presence of state security in front going to the PAO residence filming the people arriving for the transportation USINT was providing to the event. The state owned newspaper Granma ran a story on 11 December on USINT using the event to recruit "mercenaries". In an unusual turn, the story mentioned the protests by Damas de Blanco. State media normally is completely silent about protests by Cubans.

¶7. (C) Although he used most of the time demanding the end of the US trade embargo and the closing of the base at Guantanamo, Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque made a public statement for International Human Rights Day, in which he announced that Cuba will sign the UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights as well as the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. He also stated that Cuba will allow the visits of more special

rapporteurs from the newly reconstituted UN Human Rights Council to follow on the recent visit of Special Rapporteur for Food, Jean Ziegler. Dissidents by and large were baffled by the announcement since none of them believed that the GOC actually intended to improve the human rights situation. They commented that the announcement, coming on the heels of efforts to break up Human Rights Day events, was ironic at best.

18. (U) On a separate but related note, a common topic among Cubans on Monday was the sold out screening over the weekend of the German film "The Lives of Others" as part of the twenty-ninth Festival of New Latin-American Cinema in Havana.

People were amazed that the government had allowed the showing of a film about the activity of the Stasi in conducting surveillance of the population during the former East German regime. The leading role of the Stasi in training the Cuban Security forces is widely known. People who had been present at the showing of the movie said that at the end the audience wildly applauded the film but the applause stopped abruptly once the lights were turned on.

19. Comment: The Cuban opposition is very energized since they perceive a growing consensus for the need for change. It is significant that Laura Pollan commented that she has never before seen so many members of the public expressing support during a Damas de Blanco demonstration. Most Cubans remain puzzled at what they see as a schizophrenic response by the GOC. In some incidents the GOC cracks down on protests with brutal force. In the case of others, they let the activity take place without any response. The announcement of the signing of the UN Human rights agreements had Cubans asking openly: "Just who is in charge?". While it is a brazen example of regime cynicism, that is a question Cubans probably have not asked themselves in the last 50

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years.
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